Mailer and the Fifth Estate

By Bethlyn Bates

For months Norman Miler's Fifth Estate was nothing more than a Norman Mailer lecture tour.

But then Mailer heard about (CARIC, the Committee for Action/Research on the Intelligence Community: and joined with them to form the Organizing Committee for a Fifth Estate. Now he's in business—of a modest sort—to create a nationwide, nonprofit, nonpartisan citizens' intelligence organization designed to check "technofascism," the Big Brother state of George Orwell's "1984."

Saturday night Mailer spoke to about 100 guests at a Cleveland Park fundraiser for the Fifth Estate, which has four full-time employees — three of them former government agents.

Many of the guests, mostly elegantly dressed, articulate antiwar activists, had come not knowing quite what to expect but with the thought that, as one woman put it, "wine and cheese and Norman Mailer were probably worth $10 a head."

From a stairwell landing, Mailer energetically held forth for over half an hour on the Fifth Estate, including the history of his involvement:

"One night the vision of an angel came to me in my sleep and said 'You are the dolphin, and you must ride forth and save France'; the angel, being drunk, then said, 'I mean America,' I said, 'Anything to relieve me of my inimitable boredom.'"

But parts of the speech were intended to reassure listeners who still thought the whole project pretty nebulous: "This will fail if it is just more left-wing hoopla . . . it will amount to something when it has several thousand people — five, 10, 15 years from now."

Meanwhile, CARIC members answered questions and distributed literature describing past projects (such as opposing the appointment of William Colby as CIA director because of the role they believe he played in Vietnam assassinations, establishment of an intelligence library they claim is larger than the Library of Congress, section on Intelligence) and plan forming cadres nationally publication of the "Whole Spy Catalog," holding "In From-The-Cold-Hearings" in the fall.

Among those attending was ex-CIA agent Victor Marchetti, whose book "CIA: Cult of Intelligence" has been enjoined from publication because of government objections to some of its content The book, Marchetti said, "will be published anyway in May, even with big holes in it."

At 11:30 Mailer was standing on the chilly front porch drinking ice water, still talking about the Fifth Estate.

Asked about his $1 million deal with Little Brown for an as-yet-urwritten book, he said the contract was for 700,000 words and wouldn't describe the book's contents.

"It may take several years," he noted, "and during that time most of my speaking engagements will be for the Fifth Estate."

By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Norman Mailer, center, held forth with Fletcher Prouty and Victor Marchetti at Saturday's benefit for the organizing committee of the Fifth Estate.